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Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback Summer 2010

GCE

GCE Music Technology (6MT01) Paper 01 Portfolio 1

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General Introduction

The mean mark for this unit (82.1 - out of 140) was slightly higher than last year (80.8). This was mainly due to a small improvement in the quality of the logbook answers although the logbook continues to be the weaker part of the submitted work (see below). The standard of work overall, however, was broadly similar to that of 2009 with no significant change in the tasks A, B and C.

Task 1A

The stimulus for 2010, *Shopping*, by The Pet Shop Boys, raised different challenges to those presented by the 2009 stimulus. Whereas *Tainted Love* featured a swing feel and a vocal line with inflections that were quite difficult to reproduce, *Shopping* involved more timbres and tracks and was structurally more complex. There were also several details, including vocoded and sampled passages, various sound effects and a 3/4 bar.

Pitch and rhythm were generally accurate although the placing of parts in an incorrect octave was a common error. The weaker submissions tended to sequence only the given material, omitting details and parts that were not in the score and simply copying and pasting the given drum patterns. Others attempted to sample portions of the original (for which no credit was given).
Candidates should be reminded that this is primarily an aural task and that the skeleton score provides only the basics as a guide.
It may prove helpful, early in the course, to undertake a thorough aural analysis of the given track and to make additions and annotations to the skeleton score.

Choice of timbres was mostly successful, although there were some poor choices of timbre for the lead vocal part, for example pianos and vibraphones. Marks are available for creative editing of timbres although it was not always clear, either from the log or from listening, if editing had been applied. To earn these extra marks candidates needed to explain clearly what they have done.

Although dynamic variation in the track is limited, there were nonetheless opportunities to earn marks by including this feature, with build-ups at the chorus points and drops at the middle eights. This was attempted in only a few cases.

Many candidates lost marks because of lack of attention to articulation and phrasing. Synth pop is, by its nature, a rather mechanical style of music but individual riffs and lead lines are subject to shaping.
Marks are available for musical attention to note lengths and velocity so as to create a natural sense of phrase and line but many candidates most this opportunity to gain marks having apparently step entered the notes at default value with no further editing.

The vocoding and other effects were marked under the style and creativity criterion. Responses to these particular demands were very mixed and only half the candidates attempted them successfully.

Marks ranged from full marks, with outstandingly accurate and musical work, to marks in single figures where accuracy was seriously compromised or where work was incomplete.

Unfortunately some centres submitted last year's stimulus – possibly, though incorrectly, assuming that retakes were permitted.
It is crucial to view the website at the start of term to check the requirements for the coming year.

Task 1B

As in previous years, this was the most successful of the three tasks. Capture tends to be done well and it is in the processing part of the task that most marks tend to be lost. The most common errors are over (or under) compression and poorly controlled ambience or inappropriate use of effects.

Many candidates lost marks through being over-ambitious in their choice of song or through recording many tracks in addition to the unit's requirements. *Use Somebody* by Kings of Leon was a popular choice this year but this is an extremely difficult track to bring off successfully.
There were also examples of heavy metal with multiple guitars and large kits, big bands and choirs all of which obviously stretched the candidate's recording abilities too far.
Some of the most successful recordings were for vocalists with acoustic guitars and simple percussion or keyboards.

There were a number of infringements of the unit requirements for eight tracks (of which four must involve mics). Failure to meet these requirements led to a loss of marks although some candidates attempted to meet the requirements with inappropriate mic set-ups – for example a singer or a piece of hand held percussion recorded with four mics. This almost always led to a very poor ambience and mic bleed which was self-penalising.

Other infringements included recordings of incomplete songs.
Centres are reminded that the recording should be (to quote from the question paper) '**a full recording of the song with complete instrumentation**'**.** Whilst there is scope to arrange the song to suit the centre's instrumental and/or vocal resources it is not acceptable to submit just the drum part even if its recording does satisfy the required number of mics and tracks.
It is also not acceptable to include drum machines and sequenced tracks in this part of the unit.

Task 1C

Of the four options available, Latino versions of the ABBA song tended to be the most successful. Most of the Bob Dylan arrangements were ambient. Those choosing the Latino option tended to score better on variety because of the opportunity to develop rhythmic features whilst those choosing ambient predictably scored higher on music technology. Candidates who were less confident with harmony were unwise to choose the ABBA song because of the part writing demands presented by the chorus and in some of these cases the harmony was so seriously challenged that it affected the overall coherence of the arrangement.

Arranging continues to be the weaker of the three tasks, with many candidates playing the stimulus as given over a looped backing – and, in the case of ambient arrangements, over a looped series of sweeping string pads.
Candidates should be reminded that this is a **Creative** Sequenced Arrangement. It is expected that the given stimulus provides a starting point for a re-working, not a lead sheet to which an accompaniment merely needs to be added.
A very small number of centres seem to have misunderstood this task and submitted live recordings.

It is also important to study the mark scheme to see how marks are awarded. Generally, marks for use of music technology tended to be good, with most candidates achieving better than half marks. But it is the optional criteria, in particular, that should be taken into account when planning the arrangement. The work needs to be strong in three of these criteria if it is to achieve a good mark. Centres should note that at least one of these (out of melody, harmony and rhythm) is for the candidate's own additions to the stimulus, so they should concentrate on and develop at least one of these musical elements in their re-working.

In all three tasks, presentation was not always as neat as it could have been, with chopped beginnings and endings, studio noise and poor fades.

The Logbook

These were mostly well presented although in a few cases the tables and sections had been left blank.
Whilst the first part of the log is not marked it is worth remembering that the examiner may not be able to credit a particular feature of the work if the logbook documentation is missing or inaccurate. An example of this is given above, where details of edited timbres in the sequence need to be clear if they are to receive marks.

The two assessed questions were done better this year, with far fewer candidates at the very bottom achieving less than 5/20 for both questions.
Nonetheless, logbook answers, overall, tend to be disappointing with many candidates struggling to achieve better than half marks and few achieving more than 15/20.

Common errors are repetition of material and failure to provide detailed and accurate references to the candidate's own arrangement. Whilst a statement like 'I was influenced by…..' will attract some credit, more marks will be earned if the candidate goes on to explain how they were influenced and to give an example.

Statistics

Unit 1 Portfolio 1

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	140	101	91	81	71	62
Uniform boundary mark	140	112	98	84	70	56

Notes

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary mark:
The minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

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